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State of Connecticut
COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Central Office ~ 25 Sigourney Street, Hartford, CT 06106

Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

**Testimony to the Housing Committee
Tuesday, February 3, 2015**

**HB 6133, AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A FIRST OFFENDER STATUS
FOR THOSE ACCUSED OF VIOLATING THE CONNECTICUT FAIR HOUSING LAWS.**

Senator Winfield, Representative Butler, Senator Hwang, Representative Kupchick and member of the Housing Committee I am Cheryl Sharp the deputy director of CHRO. I am here today to speak in opposition to HB 6133, AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A FIRST OFFENDER STATUS FOR THOSE ACCUSED OF VIOLATING THE CONNECTICUT FAIR HOUSING LAWS.

The Commission is a substantially equivalent agency to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") That designation means that the Connecticut fair housing law is substantially equivalent to federal fair housing law. Because of our substantially equivalent status, the Commission is a party to a contract with HUD in which we are paid to investigate and prosecute fair housing cases. The federal fair housing law has no exception for a person judged a first time offender. This amendment would be in stark contrast to the federal fair housing law.

Any change to the state fair housing statute could have a grave impact on this contract. Such a considerable change to our statute to allow such leniency for a first time offender would throw our statute out of compliance with the federal fair housing act. In turn, the Commission would lose a contact with HUD worth \$400,000 per fiscal year. The loss of this contract would have a considerable negative impact on the operation of the Commission.

While this purposed change to the fair housing law is well intended, it is problematic at best. In the case of landlords the responsibility for knowledge of and compliance with the fair housing laws is essential. If a person is going to get into the business of renting houses or apartments to people they must make an effort to know all applicable laws regarding fair housing.

Lastly, what this bill does not consider is that the first time offense has an impact on the housing seeker. That person will have no remedy under this change to the statue. That potentially means a family is homeless, a tenant is unable to use a section 8 rental voucher he/she waited years on a waiting list to receive, a person is called a racially offensive slur and denied housing or a person with a disability is unable to live in an accessible unit. Where will their remedy lie if the statute is changed?

We urge rejection of the bill.

Thank you I will be happy to take questions.